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ABSTRACT

A correlational study was done on the effect of acquiescence response set upon Kogan's Attitudes Toward Old People (OP) scale. Couch and Keniston's Agreement Response (AR) scale was used as the measure of acquiescence tendency. Both scales were administered to 61 second year medical students and 44 individuals who were undergoing training in gerontology. No differences emerged for either sample group on the OP or AR scale, but both had consistently more positive than negative sentiments concerning old people. OP total scores and a subset of negatively worded OP items were found to correlate significantly in the negative direction with AR. However, acquiescence accounted for only 18% and 7%, respectively, of the score variance on OP total and OP negatively worded item subtest scores. The effect of AR was also examined by individual OP item-AR total score correlations. It was concluded that although acquiescence has a minor effect upon responses to the OP scale it appears that the item content of Kogan's scale is a more powerful influence upon respondents. (Author/GK)

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KOGAN'S ATTITUDES TOWARD OLD PEOPLE SCALE: AN ASSESSMENT OF THE EFFECT OF ACQUIESCENCE RESPONSE SET

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Providing adequate health care and other services for elderly people has recently become a matter of considerable concern and interest in the United States. This concern is in large part related to both an absolute and a proportional increase in the number of persons who are 65 years or older. One significant concomitant of this population increase is a corresponding increase in the prevalence of chronic disease, long-term illness, and disability which comprise the most frequent health problems of the elderly. Greater than 80% of those 65 and older have one or more chronic conditions, and greater than 20% with chronic ailments are limited, in some way, in their daily activities.

In order to meet growing needs for services for the health care and management of older persons, it is essential that current sources of trained personnel be expanded and new sources developed. Many institutions have responded by initiating training programs in geriatrics or gerontology. New training programs in these areas, however, must attend to the frequently reported finding that student attitudes about the aged are generally unfavorable and that, if given the choice, they would not elect to work with this age group (Coe, 1967; Wilensky & Barmack, 1970; Cambell, 1971; Heller & Walsh, 1976). It may be that the aversion of the elderly by potential health care providers reflects a more general social pattern of negativity concerning attitudes toward that age group.

A commonly reported evaluation component of aging training programs is some assessment of the students' feelings and sentiments concerning the aged. Kogan's (1961a) Attitudes Toward Old People scale is rather frequently cited as the attitudinal measure of choice. Although Kogan and others have demonstrated that attitudes toward old people are scalable with acceptable reliability and validity, subscales consisting of logically and connotatively opposite, matched positively and negatively worded item pairs on Kogan's scale correlate only from .46 to .52. This finding suggests some systematic effects of response set bias. Social desirability and acquiescence are two potential sources of response set which may confound subjects scores on Kogan's scale. In an earlier study, Sliverman (1966) found negative correlations between Kogan's scale and one measuring social desirability. The potential problem of acquiescence was investigated in the present study.

Couch and Keniston in a 1960 study argue that Likert and other types of questionnaire items inherently elicit an acquiescence bias in a subject's response pattern. That is, the subject's response to the content of the item is almost always contaminated, to some degree, by an unwanted response to the scale associated with the item. The item score, then, inextricably reflects both types of response. Indeed, Kogan (1961a, 1961b) himself addressed the issue of acquiescence in his "Old People" scale. He investigated its effects by examining the degree of logical consistency (or inconsistency) between matched positive and negative item pairs. Kogan concluded that age differences were closely related to acquiescence; that older people were more acquiescent when

This scale was used as an attitudinal measure.

In the present study, the effect of acquiescence upon Kogan's scale was directly investigated by incorporating Couch and Keniston's (1960) Agreement Response scale. It was hypothesized that if Kogan's "Old People" scale was confounded by acquiescence, then subjects would tend to respond in a systematically biased manner, and significant positive and negative correlations would be obtained between the Agreement Response scale and positively and negatively worded item subsets, respectively, on the "Old People" scale.

Method

Subjects

A total of 105 subjects from two different groups were sampled. Second year medical students (n=61) were randomly selected from the class roster and invited to participate in a longitudinal study of the impact of introducing geriatrics-related content into the curriculum. Continuing education trainee (n=44) who attended a three-day University sponsored workshop on various aspects of gerontology were asked to participate in a post-workshop evaluation study. The latter group was comprised of individuals who relate to elderly persons in many ways: 30% were employed as providers of health services (e.g., social workers, nursing home personnel, agency program administrators, etc.); 60% were not employed in a service capacity but had some involvement or interest in gerontology activities (graduate students, volunteer agency workers, personally cared for elderly relatives, etc.); 10% were retired persons who themselves were 65 years or older. Data were collected simultaneously from all subjects during the same two week period.

As expected, there were age and sex differences between the two groups. Ages of all medical students were in the low- to mid-twenties, and males outnumbered females by a 4:1 ratio. These characteristics are consistent with the general makeup of the sophomore medical student class. Trainees, however, had a mean age of 49.6 (SD=13.09), and more than three times as many females were in the group. The trainees also reported having more contact, in general, with elderly persons on a daily basis.

Materials

All subjects completed a questionnaire which was specially tailored to each group. Common to each group's questionnaire, however, were biographical items and the Attitudes Toward Old People and Agreement Response scales, which are described below in more detail. The questionnaire for medical students contained additional items designed to elicit interests and preferences for different diagnostic problems, patient age groups, and clinical practice settings. Workshop trainees' questionnaires also contained, in addition to the items listed above, relatively standard educational evaluation questions pertaining to subjective ratings of program effectiveness and usefulness.

Attitudes Toward Old People Scale. The Attitudes Toward Old People scale (OP) was developed by Kogan (1961a) and purports to measure positive and negative attitudes (prejudices rather than stereotypes) toward old people. The OP scale is a Likert instrument which consists of 34 items; 17 items which express negative sentiments about old people, and 17 items which express positive

comments (referred to Old People Negative (OPN) and Old People Positive (OPP) subscales, respectively). The set of OPN items was first constructed, then Kogan devised the OPP items so that their content was the logical connotative opposite of the OPN ones and not merely opposite but virtually identical wording. Thus, the OP scale contains 17 matched positive-negative pairs of items.

Kogan modeled the OP scale after the existing ethnic minority research and societal stereotypes about old people. Item content pertains to broad clusterings such as residential aspects of old people's lives, vague feelings of discomfort and tension experienced in the presence of old people, various qualities of old people, and cross-generational interpersonal relations. Reliability and validity studies of the OP scale are reported elsewhere (e.g., Kogan, 1961a; McTavish, 1971; Robinson & Shaver, 1973).

Acquiescence Response Scale. Couch and Keniston (1960) investigated acquiescence response set -- the general tendency to agree (or disagree) with questionnaire items, regardless of their content -- from the dual perspective of its confounding effects upon objective psychological measures and as an underlying personality dimension. One outcome of their work was the Agreement Response (AR) scale. The AR scale contains 15 Likert items. Couch and Keniston report considerable internal validity, consistency over time, and generality over numerous standard psychological tests for the AR scale. Furthermore, when AR was treated as the criterion measure of acquiescence response set it was found to correlate consistently with several personality characteristics of individuals who differentially tended to agree (or disagree) on questionnaires regardless of item content.

Procedure

Mail questionnaires containing the stimulus materials were sent to 78 randomly selected second year medical students. Although responses were made anonymously, questionnaires were coded to facilitate follow-up mailings after two weeks if no response was forthcoming to the original mailing. The final response rate was 78%.

Trainees completed a post-workshop feedback instrument and were asked to anonymously complete and return the questionnaire containing the stimulus materials after they left the campus. There was no followup contact with this group. Fifty-three trainees received the questionnaire and the final response rate was 83%. Both groups were informed that the purpose of the study was to investigate opinions about various health care referents. Assurances of compliance with human use protocols also were given.

The 34 OP and 15 AR items were randomly intermixed on the attitude questionnaire. A third subset of eight additional items pertaining to related topics was interspersed among the above items to further help disguise the OP matched item pairs. Each item appeared in a five-point Likert format. This was a departure from the original OP and AR scales that had seven-point scales (slightly agree and slightly disagree were dropped as response choices in the present study). This modification, as reported in the literature, appears to have little or no effect upon reliability. The 17 OPP and AR items were scored as follows: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = agree, 3 = uncertain, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. The 17 OPN items were recoded so that the scoring was reversed (i.e., 5 = strongly disagree, 1 = strongly agree, etc.). This recoding made it possible

to get a raw score total on each subject where a high score indicates a more positive attitude and a low score a more negative one.

Analyses

Biographical information was cross tabulated according to classifications of interest. MANOVA was done to examine mean scores on OP and AR scales. Items were analyzed by computing appropriate statistics (item means, standard deviations, item-total correlations, matched item pair correlations, and OP-AR correlations). All significance tests were at the .01 level because of the relatively large number of correlations that were generated, primarily in the item analysis.

Results

OP and AR Scales

Results obtained in the present study have generally replicated those of Kogan's (1961a) concerning the direction and magnitude of attitudes toward old people which were elicited by the OP scale. Furthermore, the present results consistently verify the acceptable psychometric properties of the OP scale originally reported by Kogan.

Analysis of summed raw scores for the different scales by MANOVA yielded no significant results (F (3,101) = 2.83, p = .042). The OP total score grand mean was 123.45 (SD = 9.46). AR total score grand mean was 42.08 (SD = 5.78). When OPP and OPN subscales were examined, it was found that subjects significantly disagreed more with negatively worded statements about old people than they agreed with positively worded ones (t (208) = -2.617, p <.001). OPP and OPN means (and standard deviations) were 59.11 (5.05) and 64.33 (5.78), respectively. A test for homogeneity of variances was not significant (F (104,104) = 1.31, p >.01).

OP total scores ranged from 100 to 147 (possible range 34 to 170); if a midpoint value of 102 is considered to be a hypothetical neutral or indifferent value, then these subjects manifested, in general, much more favorable than unfavorable attitudes toward old people (t (104) = 23.34, p <.001). A similar analysis of AR scores also indicated that the subjects, in general, were somewhat less acquiescent than what might reasonably be expected. Obtained AR scores ranged from 30 to 50 (possible range 15 to 75) and the obtained AR grand mean was significantly lower than the mean scaled midpoint value (t (104) = -5.184, p <.001).

Pearson product-moment interscale correlation coefficients for OP and AR are listed in Table 1. Significant positive correlations were found among the three separate OP scales when considered by themselves (OPP, OPN, OPT). However, OPN and OPT were also found to significantly correlate in the negative direction with AR total scores. The 34 item OP scale had an internal consistency (alpha) reliability of .78.

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Insert Table 1 About Here

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OP Items

Table 2 contains the OP item statistics (item means, standard deviations, corrected item-OP total correlations, item-AR total correlations, and OP matched positive and negative item pair correlations. Examination of individual OP item means reflects the finding that subjects tend to be more favorable than unfavorable in their attitudes toward old people as manifested in OP total raw scores. Only three item means are smaller than 3.00, the hypothetical neutral or indifference value. Thus, in only three cases did at least one member of an item pair yield means less than 3.00, but in every case at least one member of the pair exceeded this value. Furthermore, when matched item pairs are examined, there are significant mean differences favoring the negatively worded item in 11 cases and only 4 favoring the positively worded version.

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Insert Table 2 About Here

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There was considerable variability in the correlations between individual items and total OP scale scores. Corrected item-total correlations ranged from -.14 to .55 with a mean of .31 (SD = .12) and a median of .34. Significant item-total correlations were obtained for 14 of the OPN items but for only 9 of the OPP items. This is consistent with the finding that the OPN subscale tends toward higher item discriminability and, therefore, higher reliability than the OPP subscale.

Intercorrelations of individual OP items with AR total score produced correlations which ranged from -.36 to .23. However, less than 25% of the correlations were in the positive direction, and only three items were significantly correlated with AR (all were negative correlations for negatively worded items). The mean "old people"-acquiescence correlation was -.10 (SD = .14, Mdn = -.11).

The product-moment correlations for specific matched item pairs were entirely within the positive range. Correlations varied from .15 to .61 (M = .31, SD = .14), and 11 of the 16 r_{PN} values were statistically significant at the .01 level, or beyond, in the logically consistent direction of response. That is, subjects who endorsed a positively worded item tended to reject the negatively worded matched item pair which presumably connoted a logically opposite meaning. These results, as well as the obtained r_{IA} values suggest that the OP scale measures something more than merely stylistic response tendencies, although acquiescence appears to have a minor differential effect upon OPN and OPP item subsets.

Discussion

This study examined the extent to which one stylistic response tendency--acquiescence--effects subjects' responses to a scale which was devised by Kogan (1961a) and measures attitudes toward old people (OP scale). Contrary to predictions advanced earlier, a significant positive correlation was not found between positively worded statements about old people (OPP items) and acquiescence as measured by Couch & Keniston's (1960) Agreement Response (AR) scale. However, the predicted negative correlation was obtained for AR and logically opposite

negatively worded statements (OPN items). Furthermore, a significant negative correlation, although of smaller magnitude, was also found between AR and total OP scale raw scores (OPT--summed responses to OPP and OPN items).

The above correlations suggest that OPP items are uniformly free of acquiescence response set effects. The OPP items, however, generally have lower discriminating power than OPN when measured by item-total r's. Consequently, the reliability of the OPP subscale is also lower than that for the OPN subscale, although it is still of an acceptable magnitude.

OPN items were found to have higher item-total r's and, hence, reliability. Also, the OPT scale, when summed across positively and negatively worded items, showed acceptable internal consistency reliability. Both scale scores, however, seem to reflect a combination of stylistic response set and response to item content. The relative contribution of acquiescence accounted for about 18% and 7% of the variance in OPN and OPT scores, respectively. In summary, subjects unfavorably disposed toward old people also are more disposed toward acquiescence.

To further examine the response set effects on OPN and OPT, data were reanalyzed by deleting the only three OPN items that significantly correlated with AR in the negative direction. The new r's with AR were -.37 and -.22 for OPN and OPT, respectively. The latter correlation is not significant at either the .01 or .05 level. At the same time, rather trivial decreases occurred for the OPN-OPT correlation (.84 from .89) and the alpha reliability (.75 from .78) for the new 31 item scale. Thus, deleting the three OPN items which were negatively correlated with AR decreases the proportion of OP scale variance accounted for by acquiescence by about one-half with no significant loss of reliability.

Dropping the three OPN items from the scale seems unnecessary and unwarranted, however. The effect of acquiescence is of rather low to moderate magnitude and confined primarily to the OPN subscale. This effect seems to be rather effectively counterbalanced by the OPP items and serves to moderate the response set effects upon overall OPT scores. Further evidence of the "counterbalance" effect of matched item pairs is the uniformly positive correlations which were found between positively and negatively worded statements about old people. In addition, the majority of the correlations between matched items pairs was significant. Thus, it was concluded that the item content of Kogan's OP scale was a more powerful influence than acquiescence response set. In light of this finding and the acceptable psychometric properties reported here and elsewhere, use of Kogan's OP scale is encouraged when a measure of sentiments concerning old people is indicated.

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Table 1

Pearson Interscale Correlation Coefficients for OP and AR Scales

Scale	OPP	OPN	OPT
OPP			
OPN	.509**		
OPT	.849**	.887**	
AR	-.025	-.421**	-.272*

Note. Each correlation based upon n = 105.

*p < .01

**p < .001

Table 2

OP Item Means, Standard Deviations, Corrected Item - OP Total Correlations (r_{IT}), Item - AR Total Correlations (r_{IA}), and Matched Item Pair Correlations (r_{PN})

	Item[a]	M[b]	SD	r_{IT}	r_{AI}	r_{PN}
1N	It would probably be better if most old people lived in residential units with people their own age.	3.75	.81	.31	-.02	
1P	It would probably be better if most old people lived in residential units that also housed younger people.	3.59	.81	.23	.23	.44
2N	There is something different about most old people: it's hard to figure out what makes them tick.	3.88	.74	.35	-.09	
2P	Most old people are really no different from anybody else; they're as easy to understand as younger people.	3.64	.83	.35	-.12	.18
3N	Most old people get set in their ways and are unable to change.	2.91	1.05	.35	-.33	
3P	Most old people are capable of new adjustments when the situation demands it.	3.48	.80	.48	-.25	.38
4N	Most old people would prefer to quit work as soon as pensions or their children can support them.	4.04	.71	.29	.03	
4P	Most old people would prefer to continue working just as long as they possibly can rather than be dependent on anybody.	4.05	.72	.16	.02	.52
5N	Most old people tend to let their homes become shabby and unattractive.	4.07	.71	.47	-.16	
5P	Most old people can generally be counted on to maintain a clean, attractive home.	3.68	.74	.37	-.05	.39
6N	It is foolish to claim that wisdom comes with old age.	3.22	1.07	-.08	-.18	
6P	People grow wiser with the coming of old age.	3.43	.91	-.09	.12	.61
7N	Old people have too much power in business and politics.	4.09	.71	.46	-.21	
7P	Old people have too little power in business and politics.	3.14	.94	.18	.09	.38
8N	Most old people make one feel ill at ease.	3.86	.71	.23	-.23	
8P	Most old people are very relaxing to be with.	3.44	.78	.30	-.04	.17

9N	Most old people bore others by their insistence on talking about the "good old days".	3.56	.77	.38	-.24	
9P	One of the most interesting qualities of old people is their accounts of their past experience.	4.10	.66	.01	-.11	.35
10N	Most old people spend too much time prying into the affairs of others and in giving unsought advice.	4.09	.59	.36	-.35	
10P	Most old people respect others' privacy and give advice only when asked.	3.35	.82	.41	-.20	.31
11N	If old people expect to be liked, their first step is to try to get rid of their irritating faults.	3.37	.94	.30	-.24	
11P	When you think about it, old people have the same faults as anybody else.	4.11	.67	.35	.03	.16
12N	In order to maintain a nice residential neighborhood, it would be best if too many old people did not live in it.	4.09	.68	.33	-.15	
12P	You can count on finding a nice residential neighborhood when there is a sizeable number of old people living in it.	3.44	.88	.16	.16	.15
13N	There are a few exceptions, but in general most old people are pretty much alike.	4.01	.84	.25	-.11	
13P	It is evident that most old people are very different from one another.	3.53	.97	.36	-.01	.40
14N	Most old people should be more concerned with their personal appearance; they're too untidy.	3.89	.66	.47	-.15	
14P	Most old people seem to be quite clean and neat in their personal appearance.	3.68	.69	.34	.01	.35
15N	Most old people are irritable, grouchy, and unpleasant.	4.23	.50	.55	-.17	
15P	Most old people are cheerful, agreeable, and good humored.	3.29	.87	.34	.04	.14
16N	Most old people are constantly complaining about the behavior of the younger generation.	3.58	.84	.37	-.36	
16P	One seldom hears old people complaining about the behavior of the younger generation.	2.59	.88	.17	-.05	.26

17N	Most old people make excessive demands for love and reassurance.	3.69	.66	.38	-.19	
17P	Most old people need no more love and reassurance than anyone else.	2.57	.99	-.14	-.06	-.15

Note. All values based upon n=105. Correlations $>$ .254 are significant at the .01 level, and r $>$ .195 are significant at the .05 level.

[a]Items are listed in pairs; N represents the negatively worded item and P the positively worded version.

[b]Scoring was reversed on OPN items to make them comparable to the OPP subscale. Thus, higher mean values indicate more favorable attitudes for both the OPP and OPN subscale items.